WHIRRAKEE

August 2012

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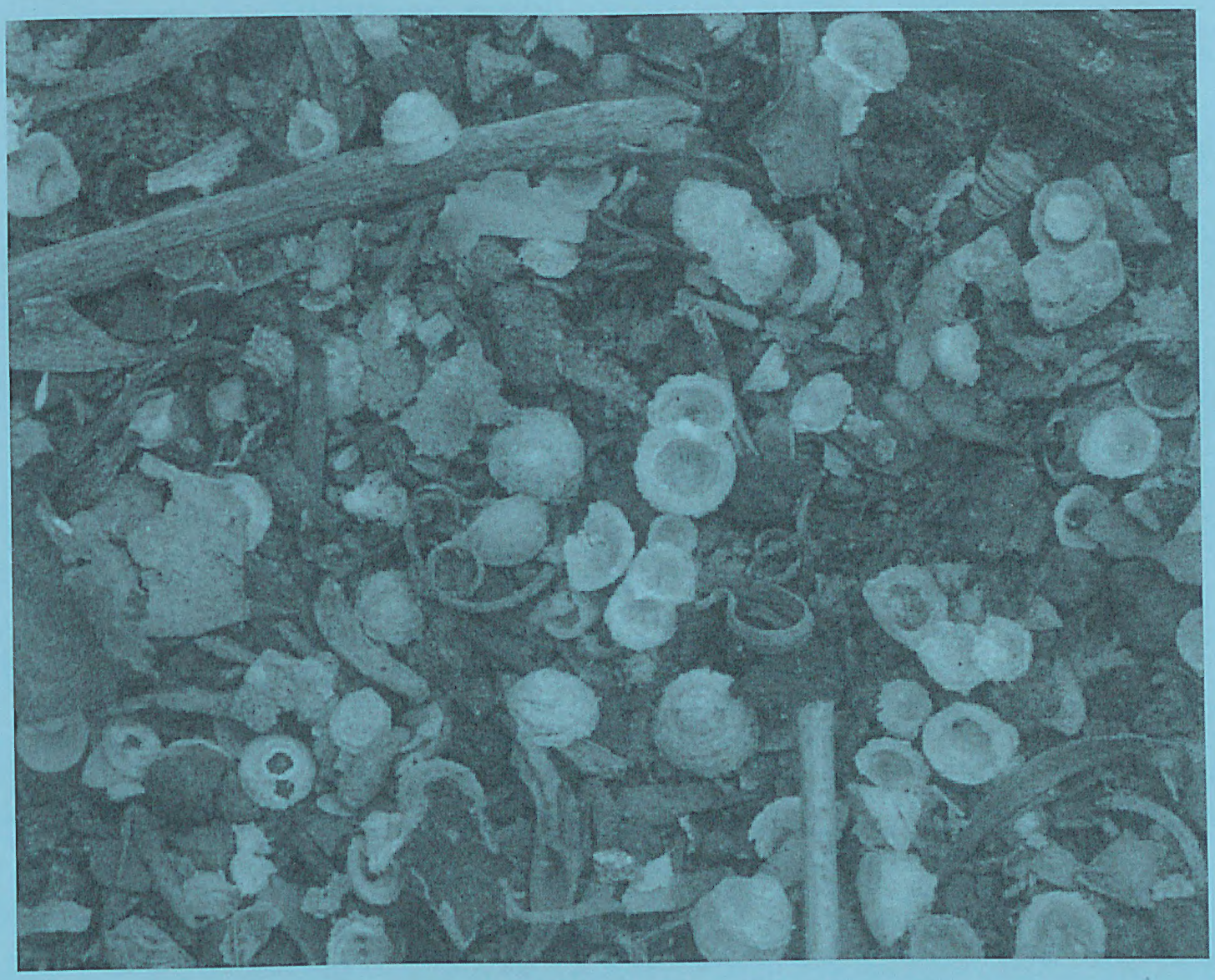

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552. Web address: www.BendigoFNC.com.au
ISSN 0812-423X e-mail address: info@bendigofnc.com.au

Office Bearers for 2011 - 2012

President	Jan Orr	5443 5668
Senior Vice President	Matthew Comer	0409 162627
Junior Vice President	*position vacant*	
Secretary	Stuart Fraser	5443 1326
Minute Secretary	Anne Bridley	
Treasurer	Ben Goonan	
Membership Officer	Anne Bridley	5442 6188
Excursion organiser	*position vacant*	
Syllabus organiser	Ben Goonan	
Librarian	Diana Collier (an assistant is still required)	5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Matthew Comer	0409 162 627
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis (assisted by Rob Moors)	0407 427179
Whirrakee contact	Sabine Wilkens e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797
Whirrakee mailing coordinator	Rod Orr	5443 5668

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with a 10 minute thing-of-the night natural history segment. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Anne Bridley, Glenise Moors, Joy Clusker, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner.

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one sub-group (the Fauna Study Group) and is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Fauna Study Group: Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)
Regular fauna excursions take place most Fridays. See page 11 for details.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188.
To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front cover photo?...see page 2

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 33, No. 7, August 2012
Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note. During spring there is always a flurry of articles, because so much happens, but this year, this pleasant side-effect for the Whirrakee *has come early. In part, this is due to the meticulous preparation for the SEANA excursion, so that any slight wrinkles in the program were ironed out, before Bendigo presents its natural beauty to the rest of the world. All members would have received the program of activities, so let's hope for wonderful weather and vigorous participation. Some contributions to this edition had to be delayed till next months, so my apologies to Nicole and Rod and to David, our June speaker whose interesting talk is yet to be re-told.*
On another note, August is just one month away from the Annual General Meeting and the end of your membership year. Please consider nominating someone, or agree to be nominated, for one of the office bearer's jobs or to go on the committee, if you are new to the club. Many hands and fresh ideas make running the club a pleasure.

Front page photographer: Rod Orr
During the July Whipstick excursion, these lerps as well as a lot of other interesting things were seen on the walking track at Flagstaff Hill (under Green Mallee). Leprs are the waxy, sugary covers that psyllids construct from the excess carbohydrate they obtain from sugary plant sap. In wet, windy weather, these are often blown from their leaves in their thousands. Can you spot the lerps with holes in them? The holes are probably a result of hyperparasites (e.g. small wasps) attacking the psyllid underneath the waxy cover, and laying an egg inside them.

Short Notices

Conservation and Land Management Pathway Program .

• Are you interested in the conservation and land management industry?
• Would you like to learn more about the opportunities that are available in this field?
• Thinking about trying a short course to see what might be involved?
• Do you have good field skills but would like to learn about putting this knowledge into reports
• Are you considering applying for the Conservation and Land Management Certificate IV Program in 2013 but would like to try some units and get support in the application process?
• Do you need some assistance with the computer skills and report writing to help with your study and/or employment in this field?
Then the Conservation and Land Management Pathways program is for you. **Information/ enrolment session**_Tuesday 28th August 4.30pm Location: Arrival centre seminar room Charleston Road Campus. **Course Commencement** Tuesday 11th September Delivery will be on Tuesday, Wednesdays and Thursdays for 6 weeks Please don't hesitate to contact Tony for further advice on the units or delivery of the program.
tmisson@bendigotafe.edu.au T : 5434 1759

Regent Honeyeater Project, Benalla, community tree planting – Weekend 25-26August
Organiser: John Lindner
Mob: 0447 111409, jwl.bendigo@gmail.com
(this is the best way to contact me)

See description of this project in the July *Whirrakee*. It involves planting trees and understorey species, to improve the habitat for the Regent Honeyeater (and incidentally, many other species, of course). Accommodation and some meals are provided. John Lindner needs to know who is interested in attending one week before the event.

Report from the July Whipstick excursion

by Rod Orr

During this excursion, led by Matt Comer, we all enjoyed being back in that very special part of our surrounding forests where the imminent flowering season is now so promising. The first stop at Rifle-Range Road showed an interesting contrast between the recently burnt side of the road and the un-burnt areas where most of the Spring wildflower display always attracts local Field Naturalists. Many of these shrubs should be flowering just in time for our Field Naturalist visitors from all over South-eastern Australia. Even the burnt areas had some interesting fungi beginning to show their fruiting bodies in the blackened soil.

We visited Shadbolts Picnic area for lunch. "Come and see the native bee" was an invitation, while I was on hands and knees taking photos of fungi. I've been fooled before by 'Bee Mimics', so I was more than a bit sceptical about this beautiful bee-like insect. On this occasion, I think that most observers were fooled. I took its photo but kept quiet about what I thought it really was, 'buying time' so that I could magnify my photo and look for a definitive ID.

The striped thorax, wasp-like colours on the abdomen and beautifully patterned eyes really were ample evidence - the insect was a Hover Fly or Drone Fly. It's a native insect with a remarkable resemblance to bees or large wasps. It's difficult to see from the photo (see page 4), but it only has one pair of wings, so it is a fly, not a bee or wasp (Hymenoptera have 2 pairs of wings but Diptera have only one pair). I looked for the balance organs (halteres) which act as counterweights and are important in enabling a fly to change direction very rapidly (they are the other pair of 'wings', but reduced to stumps), but I couldn't see them - some flies have very reduced halteres and others have 'lost' them completely (perhaps Bee and Wasp Mimics are more likely to have very reduced or completely missing halteres - it certainly makes a more convincing disguise - less fly-like and more bee-like) ...continued on page 8.

Images from the July Whipstick & the southern Kamarooka excursion
Photos and text by Rod Orr

← This native Drone Fly that was seen 'resting' on a gravel path near the picnic area. Rod Orr identified it as *Eristalinus punctulatus*, the Australian Drone Fly. (Order Diptera, Family Syrphidae)

Below: *Mycena* sp. growing amongst leaf & bark litter in Phillips Gully. The fungi were covered in a transparent mucilage which also dripped down along the stems. The diameter of the largest cap was less than 1 cm ↓

← Another *Mycena* species growing in Phillips Gully. This is another small fungus, growing in a clump (caespitose) - these were only ~ 1 cm diameter and most were only 3 or 4 cm tall. *Mycena albidofusca* describes the pale, flattened, central part of the cap (the umbo) - the rest is a pale brownish colour. *Mycena* species have a white spore print which you can sometimes see on one of the lower caps in a group like this.

Heterotextus miltinus growing on decaying wood at Black Rock. These are tiny, bright orange-yellow jelly fungi, only 1 mm or so in size. ➔

Joy Clusker found the colourful larvae below during a previous BFNC excursion to the Whipstick. They were in what appeared to be highly enriched soil at the base of Daphne Heath. It's the sort of place you'd expect to find Hover Flies - in an organically rich environment. I couldn't manage to keep them alive when I tried to see what sort of pupa & adult would develop from these larvae - the couple that I brought home just dried out & died. They looked to be thriving in this seething mass just under the soil, however. A different strategy is called for, obviously!

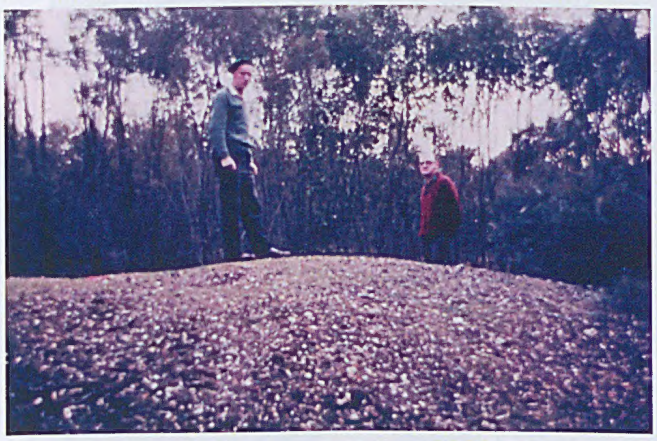
↑

← a very green black rock, was a delight to see

Re-discovering the big mallee fowl mound **Photos by John Lindner**

As it was then...

Bob Allen (left) and Tom Patullo (right) at the mound. This undated photo show its very stony nature (unknown photographer)



↑ a group of children on the mound, dated 24/10/1989, perhaps taken on a Junior Field Naturalists Group excursion.

As it is today...

The high, north side of the mound, presumably built up due to the sloping ground ↓

↑ Kate Lindner and Allan Spence on the big mound, 6/7/2012. The central depression can be seen, which indicates the position of the egg chamber. The high north side is at the front. The stoniness and lichen cover are again quite evident.

Below, a general view of Leon Ruedin's eucalyptus distillery, showing the boiler with the remains of the shed which once enclosed it, the two brick distilling vats in the ground and the wooden crane used to lower and raise the pallets of leaves in and out of the vats.

The mallee roller, made out of a very large Yellow Box trunk according to Noel Ruedin ↓

↑

The remains of the concrete house which Leon and Lorna Ruedin lived in at times during the war years, when they were regularly operating the distillery.

My reference books were fairly useful but the Web had more detailed information and a couple of sites actually had a photo of 'our' insect. A search for Australian Drone Fly also produces lots of interesting results. One site offered 'photos of Hoverflies with nice legs', but I resisted that one and so should you!

The Hoverflies have interesting larvae, many species have 'rat-tailed maggots' which are found in all sorts of unpleasant (to us) environments - polluted drains, in the soil under dead animals etc. I think that the striking red-coloured maggots that we saw in the bush a couple of years ago along Rifle Range Road were probably Hoverfly larvae (see page 5).

We travelled along Skylark Road through that wonderful miniature forest of mixed mallee eucalypts with sections of the understorey dominated by Gold-dust Wattle - again, this should be beautiful later in August. Loeser Road and Black-Rock Road were surprisingly wet (and slippery) but we persisted and managed to drive to the track into Black Rock. The walk in was also along a very wet track. Black Rock was amazing in these conditions - everything had turned green! (see page 5). The *Phebalium* was just beginning to flower, Daphne Heath was in bud, but the lichens and mosses were spectacular. The weather wasn't too kind, but everyone seemed to enjoy this special place - it's a real pity that there is a current mining application for this area. Even if the fenced area, which excludes browsing animals from the small patch of our rare local *Phebalium*, could still be protected, the surrounding mallee vegetation would be devastated by any disturbance caused by exploration or mining.

We turned back to the South and stopped next at Phillips Gully to check up on the Whipstick Westringia - not flowering yet but in bud - the fungi growing in the deep leaf & branch litter under the large Ironbarks kept some of us interested, however (see page 5).

We drove along Melotte Road to see the Bent-leaf Wattle, which was still flowering and in quite good condition for a Winter-flowering species. Matt was also able to show everyone examples of the four locally-occurring mallee eucalypts, all growing along this roadside.

At this stage of the excursion, the weather was closing in and the light was fading badly, so the decision was made to turn South towards Bendigo - if we had turned North we could have continued up to the Kamarooka with all of its special features, but there just wasn't time to include this. There is always too much to see when you have a group of interested naturalists, especially when there are flowering plants & fungi to photograph. The bird list should have been reasonably long even though they mostly kept quiet, not encouraged by the damp, dull conditions, perhaps?
...the collective list is on the bottom of page 11

The search for the Big Mallee Fowl mound
Author: John Lindner

Many years ago, when I was quite new to Bendigo and a strict beginner in the study of natural history, one of the places of "legend" was Leon Ruedin's eucalyptus factory in the north-eastern Whipstick. Leon and his wife Lorna lived there for a while when they were younger, and he was operating the distillery on a regular basis. At intervals we went out there on club outings to inspect the remains of that cumbersome technology – the boiler encased in bricks, the two vats sunk in the ground with the crane between them, the massive log roller and the condensation pit. In addition there were the remains of Lorna and Leon's concrete slab house, a tiny four-roomed affair with a verandah (see page 7).

Now, the other big attraction was the "biggest mallee fowl nest in the Whipstick". This was located a few hundred metres along a track to the north-west from the distillery, and a short distance into the scrub. It seemed to be relatively easy to find in those days. Of

course, I wasn't paying attention all that closely to how we got there – I was strictly a follower.

This impressive mound was made almost entirely of stones, both quartz pebbles and ironstone shot, which is other rocky material coated in a layer of iron-rich material. It was similar in form and composition to all the other smaller mallee fowl nesting mounds that I had seen in the Whipstick, but of course it was quite huge by comparison. At one stage, when the mound was actively being used to incubate eggs, the stones would have been mixed up with a large amount of organic matter (leaves, bark, small twigs, perhaps a little grass), especially in the centre of the mound where the egg chamber is located. Of course it is the bacterial and fungal decay of this organic matter which produces the heat which ultimately incubates the eggs and gets them to hatching stage. Over time all of this organic matter, which is no longer being augmented since the demise of the birds in the area, has been leached out of the mound. The result is that the mound is largely now mineral matter (rocky particles of all sizes and soil) and very solid at that.

I recently decided to run a Whipstick walk for the Bendigo Bushwalking and Outdoor Club, a west to east traverse, in fact. This was to start at Millwood Dam on Millwood Road and end at Round Creek over in the Kamarooka Forest, about 12 k away. The walk begins at one of the most attractive dams in the Whipstick, a great place for bird watching, both because of the nectar provided by the plentiful Yellow Gums and the dense shrubbery around the water's edge which allows small birds to approach under protective cover when they need to drink and bathe in hot weather. The walk winds its way through various mallee habitats to end in the Grey Box dominated section of what is now the Greater Bendigo National Park, but which was formerly known simply as the Kamarooka Forest. Round Creek is the only area in the Whipstick as far as I know that has quite large River Red Gums on a fairly permanent waterhole.

In fact, I used to do this same walk with Jan Orr's Grade 6 pupils at Gravel Hill Primary School back in the nineteen-eighties. For several years in October, we used to walk to Round Creek, camp the night and then walk back again the following day. It was always an interesting experience and the children seemed to quite enjoy it – they had always been well prepared. However I clearly remember in those days how my feet used to suffer agonies in the heat because I had no orthotics to support my big flat plates. I would get back to Millwood Dam on day two with them absolutely on fire. Now I've got orthotics – very good ones at that - and things are much improved.

I needed to reconnoitre this walk since it is many years since I had done it. And I can assure you many things have changed out there in 20 years. One of the most devastating is Campbell's Road, which used to be an insignificant, narrow, east-west bush track, with rather marvellous views from a couple of little hills of the "ocean" of mallee scrub and westwards to Mount Korong, far away on the plain. Now, this track has been widened to at least two chains (about 40 metres), and appears to be part of a major strategic fire-break corridor, since much of the bush to the north has been burned to reduce the fuel load. The re-sprouting of mallees and melaleucas in this blackened zone is most interesting. I went out on two occasions with Allan Spence, and we had quite a bit of difficultly "joining the dots" between known locations and bits which I had forgotten or had been quite altered.

On the traverse I wanted to be able to show the walkers the big mallee fowl mound. And guess what? – I could not find it at all. We knew its approximate position from map number one in Frank Robbins' Whipstick series, but at that scale the mound would have been quite a hill at 10 chains wide (about 200 metres!). I thought I would be able to find my way to it with relative ease, but it was not to be. We headed into the scrub, and blundered about but came up with nothing. Not only that, but visibility through the understory

seemed to be extremely limited since the regrowth from the former harvesting area was quite dense. On a second occasion (5 May) we spent quite some time going over the area, but again got nowhere. I reckoned I was on the point of shouting "Eureka" several times, but only found small bare patches of ground instead of the prize.

So I needed help. One way might be to consult some old aerial photographs of the area, so as to perhaps be able to locate the mound by reference to a known fixed point. I contacted Roger Muller, who is now Manager of Survey Services in the Department of Sustainability and Environment. Roger used to be Berry Vardy's (a notable member of our club in years gone by) assistant. Roger was able to obtain some 1985 aerial photographs of the Whipstick, taken from 13,000 feet and with a scale of 1:25,000. We squinted and played around viewing these images through a stereoscopic viewer, and Roger presented us with enlargements of the target area at 200% and 300%. However all the enticing circular blobs and shadows on the map seemed to me to be either products of our imagination or artefacts of the enlargement process. Besides, at the scale of the photograph, they would have been circles tens of metres across, way too large again.

The third day of searching was scheduled for Friday 6 July. We estimated that the mound was about 300 metres down the track leading north-west from the distillery. I paced this distance off (64 double paces of mine equals 100 metres). Alan and I entered the low Blue Mallee regrowth scrub, and headed generally parallel to the track, calling to each other to keep in contact. Things did not look very promising at all, until suddenly the distinctive mound appeared ahead, situated among a grove of mature mallees whose bare trunks created an open space around it. I have to say that locating the mound on this occasion was more due to luck than skill – I don't really think we had refined the target area by that much.

The mound is about ten metres in diameter and one metre high. The central depression over the former egg chamber is about 2 metres in diameter (see photo on page 6). Ironstone-coated gravel seems to predominate on the surface, with fewer quartz fragments. At this time of year the cover of foliose lichen seems to be about 50%, so the overall effect is one of being quite green. The mound is surrounded by mature Green, Blue and Bull Mallee, and due to their bare trunks it appears to sit in a quite well defined clearing. But outside that clearing the mallee bushes resume their usual density, and visibility is much reduced.

We took a bearing of 10 degrees magnetic to get back to the track, which was roughly 100 metres away. Then we took a back-bearing of 190 degrees magnetic to check that we could hit the target the other way. We were now further away from the eucalyptus distillery, about 420 metres by my reckoning.

There is a certain poignancy in standing in the presence of a large, elegantly shaped mound of stones which once signified the industriousness of innumerable pairs of Mallee Fowl over countless years. Gradually the size of the mound would have increased, as it was re-opened, refreshed with new material and reused, not necessarily each successive year. What you are contemplating is a now a wonderful relic of determined and focussed activity, surely a marvel of nature.

References

From *The Bendigo Naturalist*
- Ruedin L., "Our Whipstick Mallee Fowl", Volume 3. Number 1, October 1969, pgs 4 -5
- Patullo T., Ruedin's eucalyptus factory, cover photo on Vol. 5, No. 2, September 1972
From *Whirrakee*
I haven't been able to check for any references because my whole collection is in storage and inaccessible. I know there at least a few articles.
- *Noel Ruedin:* History of the eucalyptus factory, personal communication, 8/7/2012

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday August 8 7.30pm
Dr Clive Minton, Victorian Wader Study Group, 'A Lifetime of Bird Banding'

Wednesday September 12 7.30pm
Dr Peter Vesk, The Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Environmental Decisions, School of Botany, University of Melbourne: 'To-wards spatial prioritisation of revegetation for birds'

Wednesday October 10 7.30pm
Dr Gregory Holland, Research Fellow, Faculty of Science and Technology, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Deakin University: 'Fire in box-ironbark forests: an experimental investigation of ecological outcomes'

Wednesday November 14 7.30pm
Professor Max Finlayson, Director, Centre of Research Excellence Institute for Land, Water and Society, Charles Sturt University: 'The biodiversity crisis – globally and Australia'

Club Excursions
The program for the SEANA camp (incl. excursions) was sent out to members. For details, please go the web-page at: www.BendigoFNC.com.au and click on 'useful links', then follow the SEANA link to get to the program.

Regular Fauna Excursions
Every Friday morning starting at around 9 to 9:30 the Fauna Group inspects nest boxes in the Spring Gully area. The excursions are led by Maurie Lewis, 16 Vains St. Golden Square. Phone 0407 427 179. Phone Maurie to confirm exact departure times and location. If you don't phone and go directly to Maurie's house and find nobody at the house between 9 and 9:30, then the excursion is not on.

Family Nature Club
The next activity will involve bird observation and identification with Nicole Howie. Please register if you are turning up with family, or let Jan and Rod know if you intend to offer assistance.
Check out their 2011 and 2012 activities at http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/
Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.
W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Collective list of birds from the Whipstick excursion, see page 3 (between Rifle Range Rd and Melotte's Rd.) via Anne Bridley

Wedge-tailed Eagle
Galah
Musk Lorikeet
Superb Fairy-wren
Spotted Pardalote
Striated Pardalote
Shy Heathwren
Weebill
Brown Thornbill
Chestnut-rumped Thornbill
Buff-rumped Thornbill
Red Wattlebird
White-eared Honeyeater
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater
Brown-headed Honeyeater
White-naped Honeyeater
Eastern Spinebill
Red-capped Robin
Golden Whistler
Grey Shrike-thrush
Grey Fantail
Grey Butcherbird
Australian Magpie
Grey Currawong
Australian Raven, White-winged Chough
Mistletoebird, Silvereye